

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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B-3673

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Bernheimer-Leader Department Store

other names/site number May Company Store; The Hecht Company

2. Location

street & number 118 North Howard Street ☐ not for publication
city or town Baltimore ☐ vicinity
state Maryland code MD county Baltimore code 510 zip code 21202

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☐ nomination
request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places
and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the
National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☐ locally. (☐ See continuation
sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register
criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

☐ entered in the National Register

See continuation sheet.

☐ determined eligible for the National Register

See continuation sheet.

☐ determined not eligible for the
National Register

☐ removed from the
National Register

☐ other (explain):

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)	Category of Property (Check only one box)	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>
			Total

Name of related multiple property listing
listed in the
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)
N/A

Number of contributing resources previously
National Register
0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)
COMMERCE/TRADE: Department Store

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)
WORK IN PROGRESS

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)
Classical Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)
foundation Granite
walls BRICK
Limestone
roof ASPHALT
other TERRACOTTA
Copper

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or a grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE _____
ARCHITECTURE _____

Period of Significance

1925-1950 _____

Significant Dates

1925, 1941, 1948 _____

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Smith, Wilson L. _____
May, Howard _____

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

age of Property 0.6436 acres; site dimensions: 180'-2" x 155'-8"; Legal ref.: Ward 4, Sec. 10, Blk 619, lots 18-27

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1 18	360880	4350150	3		
2			4		

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jean K. Wolf, Consultant

organization John Milner Architects date December 22, 1999

street & number Rt. 1 & Rt. 100, PO Box 937 telephone 610-388-0111; Wolf 610-896-3629

city or town Chadds Ford state PA zip code 19317

Additional Documentation Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Mr. David H. Hillman, President, Southern Management Corp., Agent

street & number 11950 Old Gallows Road telephone 703-902-2000

city or town Vienna state VA zip code 22182

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Section 7, Description: Page 1 Bernheimer-Leader Department Store
Baltimore, MD**

Summary

The department store building of 1925 built for Bernheimer-Leader Stores and most recently known as The Hecht Company store, stands as a Neoclassical eight-story rectangular block on a basement and sub-basement at the corner of North Howard and West Lexington Streets within the heart of Baltimore's downtown Market Center commercial district. The restrained classically detailed facades extend in 10 bays along Howard Street and in 12 less regular bays along Lexington Street where the building was expanded twice by the May Company (1941 and 1948). Construction materials consist of steel framing and concrete enclosed by facades made up of a pink Vermont granite base, Indiana limestone trim, buff colored brick, and a decorative terra cotta cornice and copper roof eave. The principal architectural feature of the building is the continuous band of arched storefront windows and a second floor level of rectangular fenestration finished on both facades in limestone cladding topped by a projecting belt course. Limestone pilasters with flat, but delicate, Corinthian-style capitals support the spring points of each arch and supply decorative details (at the westernmost end of the north facade and at the northeast corner of the building the windows of the arches have been altered for new retail entrances). Floors three through seven are wrought in buff brick in a common bond pattern. The primary windows of the main facades on floors two through eight are positioned in pairs over each first floor arch of the store fronts. These windows are steel and have double-hung, one-over-one light sash. The eighth floor forms the architectural cap of the building, repeating limestone cladding after a projecting limestone belt course beneath the windows. Above the windows flows a limestone frieze of alternating medallions. A dentilated glazed terra cotta cornice and modillion blocks under the roof eave are finished at the top with an ornate copper-sheathed parapet. The flat roof has a bi-level penthouse for mechanical equipment at the southwest corner.

Setting

The North Howard and West Lexington Street setting of the former Bernheimer-Leader/Hecht Company department store represents one of the premiere locations for retail shopping in Baltimore between 1875 and 1950. The series of five large department stores built along the north-south Howard Street artery and on the perpendicular Lexington Street resulted from two events: increased retail opportunities generated by the daily population that visited the sheds and stalls of the Lexington Street farmers market and the overall growth of department stores in America after the Civil War. The continuous competition between these family-founded stores caused architectural expansions throughout the decades, especially after many became absorbed in corporate entities. By the 1980s when the inner city retail businesses had been outpaced by new suburban shopping malls, the economic viability of the downtown department stores ended. As the stores closed, the changed facades on North Howard and West Lexington Streets remained to tell the architectural and commercial history of the blocks. The styles ranged from Hutzler's Romanesque Revival design with an *art moderne* addition to the Italianate Beaux Arts facade of Stewarts and the Neoclassical facade of the expanded Hecht Company store. Each building had its own distinctive architectural character and style as well its individual approach to the retail market and to attracting customers. By the end of the 20th century, building losses and changes due to vacancies, fires, vandalism, and adaptive use have had an impact on all these buildings. Four of the five primary department stores remain intact within the streetscape. The former Bernheimer-Leader Store, most recently known as The Hecht Company, represents Neoclassic architecture of the first quarter of the century and retains its integrity despite application of new individual retail storefronts on the Lexington Street side.

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Architectural Description

The earliest core of this building was constructed in 1925 for the Bernheimer-Leader Stores and extended 155'-8" on North Howard Street and 91' on West Lexington Street. It backed on to a narrow alley called Marion Street. The design was that of the architectural firm Smith & May of Baltimore. Two years after the original construction the building was purchased by The May Company. In 1941, using the same architects, May Company expanded the store along Lexington Street by 47 feet, creating a matching section at the eight-story height. The exterior details replicated the core building. Yet another expansion took place between 1946 and 1948 along Lexington Street under the Baltimore architect Francis J. Thuman. This added 42 more feet along the streetscape and matched the same roof line and cornice details. Incorporated in this three-bay section was a new entrance and display windows with flat heads rather than the historic prevailing arches.

The current footprint of this rectangular building measures 155'-8" along North Howard Street and 180'-2" along West Lexington Street (PLANS: Subject Site Plan, Survey, and Floor Plans A1-A14). The eight-story steel frame and concrete structure is enclosed at these east and north elevations by masonry of buff-colored brick in a common or running bond pattern and Indiana limestone cladding and detailing. A pink Vermont granite base supports the first floor limestone arches and metal and glass storefront fenestration. The architectural design of the building features restrained symmetrical and Neoclassic detailing shown in three different horizontal masonry treatments of the facade that divide the height into three distinct sections. Simultaneously, a continuous pattern of rectangular windows on the upper floors linked with arches at street level provides vertical and horizontal articulation and rhythm that flows around the building corner and ties the two later additions to the main block.

The building was designed to sit on a two-story limestone clad base. At the first floor this consists of piers supporting ten arches and a frieze that create and surround storefront windows (PHOTOS 1-5). On Howard Street there are ten arches; twelve occur along Lexington Street (three at the west end are square headed). At the second story, paired double-hung windows align with the arches and are topped by a projecting belt course. This entire base section is clad with limestone veneer with butter joint pointing. Immediately above this base is a five-story center section with the same fenestration pattern as the second floor, but set in buff brick with flat mortar joints. Limestone sills accentuate the window openings. The third and top section of the building is the eighth story, again all clad in limestone veneer. A projecting belt course that replicates the one at the second floor, supports the limestone section surrounding the eighth-floor windows. These windows are slightly recessed and framed by pilasters; they align with those on the lower floors. Above the eighth-floor window band is a well articulated frieze decorated regularly by alternating reliefs of oval medallions and *fleur de lis*. A dentilated cornice and a deep projecting roof eave with modillion blocks, all of white glazed terra cotta, rim the primary building facades on Howard and Lexington Streets. The parapet is finished with a decorative copper coping at these facades as well. The entire eighth-floor limestone and terra cotta section turns the corner and terminates on the west and south facades of the building, which are otherwise comprised of brick (see PHOTOS 2, 3, 5).

At the ground-floor level of the building base the architectural interest stems from the series of arches that create the continuous ribbon of storefront display windows and entrances. The design of the pilasters with flat Corinthian-like capitals has been maintained throughout the later additions along Lexington Street with the exception of the last three bays built in 1948. The original store fronts have pilasters that are undecorated (light sconces were applied later). The capitals, instead, achieve the decorative detail. Each corner of a capital features a geometric scroll with a smaller, organic scrolled leaf

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**Section 7, Description: Page 3 Bernheimer-Leader Department Store
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tucked beneath it. In between an abstract flower with two buds and leaves symmetrically placed on the stem have been positioned in relief. A simple horizontal metal band links the capitals across the facades and creates demilunes of glass above and large rectangular display windows below. (Historically awnings hung above the display windows from an earlier banding.) Each window is further divided into three by vertical metal muntins. A horizontal muntin breaks each rectangular display window about a foot from the sill. The metal window frames and limestone cladding sit on a pink Vermont granite base that runs around the building to create a level course at the sidewalk.

Entrances to the building at the storefront level occur in five locations, all of which have been modified. An entrance on North Howard Street, set back in the second arch from the south corner, contains two double-leaf glass doors that lead to a hallway with the primary bank of elevators for the building. At the northeast corner of Howard and Lexington Streets, to accommodate a drugstore business, the display windows of five archways (two on Howard, three on Lexington) were removed in 1995. Instead, a recessed glass entrance was created within the former display area. The entrance is approached by three granite steps (see PHOTO 4). In the third arch on Lexington Street the display window was modified to a recessed storefront of glass and metal with a single door. Over this entrance and the neighboring arch to the west extends a deep, lighted, metal marquee advertising the business. A similar marquee projects from the Howard Street facade. The locations of both stem from the original 1925 construction but have been modernized. Farther west on Lexington Street a fourth and early entranceway to the building leads to the north stair fire tower. The double-leaf glass door is positioned off-center to the west within the glass storefront of the construction. The fifth entrance to the building occurs in the last three bays that were added in 1948. Although the pilasters were originally designed with flat heads rather than arches, these bays were compromised in 1982 by the addition of three awnings that project from the second floor level beneath the belt course. The awnings conceal the original windows and the limestone facade, though they remain intact. At this location as well, modifications to create a recessed entranceway and display windows have impacted the limestone cladding. These three bays serve a retail space currently occupied by a shoe store chain.

The distinctive feature of the upper floors of the main facades is the fenestration pattern of paired windows over the arches except at the corners where they are single units. Because of the two additions to the building on the Lexington Street facade, three extra single window bays occur. To create architectural interest to the large masonry and window expanse, the brickwork spandrel is slightly inset beneath each window, creating the effect of projecting masonry piers, which further define the bays. The overall result creates depth and shadow lines to what could otherwise be a monotone plane. The windows themselves are plain but heavy, double-hung steel sash with one-over-one lights. The sash frames are bolted into the steel frames, which in turn are anchored into the masonry openings. On the interior the deep jambs of the masonry openings are plastered. In about 1980, opaque acrylic panels were attached over the glass sash and frames. From the street, these have caused the windows to read as if they have a narrow frame. They also reflect no light, unlike typical glazing. The panels have also prevented maintenance and have allowed moisture retention, resulting in badly rusted metal frames and window sash.

On the two secondary facades of this building, masonry and window treatments differ. The west facade that faces the Lexington Market is exposed only at floors four through eight (see PHOTO 2). Masonry is buff-colored brick throughout with a sheet metal parapet flashing at the roof level. No windows occur. On the south facade at Marion Street, brick belt courses are constructed into the buff brick surface to integrate with the limestone belt courses on the main facades (see

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PHOTOS 3, 5). Here three sets of window bays extend from the third to the eighth floor and light the staircases and elevator shafts of the building. The windows are narrower than the ones on the main facades and have wired glass with industrial-style sash. No protective panels have been applied. Above the main roof level an original two-level penthouse extension can be seen at the top of the south facade. The three window bays of this facade continue to the first penthouse level; the upper level has a band of seven double-hung windows. All windows in the penthouse are industrial-style steel and wire glass.

The roof of the building is comprised of a concrete deck and is protected by a single-ply membrane roofing system. The bi-level penthouse structure at the southwest corner is built of steel frame, concrete, and either buff or industrial red brick, plus some stucco cladding and trim. Terra cotta tile is used on the interior, which houses early mechanical systems. Windows are either double-hung three-over-three lights or pivot units of different sizes and glazing. Sills are limestone or cast stone. A small frame stair tower penthouse and many vent penetrations and equipment items are located on the roof as well.

The early interiors of the first half of the century were renovated extensively over time, especially in 1959 when a "modernization" was undertaken at all levels for The Hecht Company's presence in the building. Further changes were made in 1981 and 1982 to reduce the square footage of the retail space and convert the upper three floors as office space for use by the City. All partition walls were removed on the first floor and retail space was made visible through the earlier display windows. Aside from the structural framework, all that remains of the earlier interior architecture are two stair towers and the elevator cores. Escalators were installed during the 1948 expansion of the store at the central area of the floor plan between the second and seventh floors. Partial dismantling and renovation of this system occurred in 1982.

Throughout the interior the steel framing is generally encased with concrete with reinforced concrete floor decks. Terra cotta dimensional tiles were also incorporated within the construction for fire-resistance, a typical process for this period of construction. In the retail store section, after the recent dismantling of modern walls on the upper floors, the building appears much as it did in 1948, showing large open spaces with the flexibility to meet the changing needs of a retail department store. Interior finishes remaining from most recent department store occupancy include remnants of various types of flooring, ceiling, and wall systems and hardware items. It appears that wood strip flooring had been applied over the concrete substrate initially. Modernizations included vinyl tile or ceramic or stone tiling. More recently broadloom carpeting was the fashion. Wall and ceiling finishes were originally plaster and lath, but after many interventions and display changes, vinyl wall covering and suspended acoustic panel and tile ceilings had been installed. Remaining bathroom finishes of the 1980s renovations show the use of ceramic tiles. The current retail tenants on the first and mezzanine floors have used wood or steel frame partitions and wallboard as needed to enclose offices, storage, and display needs. In the basement and penthouses original utilitarian finishes have been retained, including concrete floors and walls, concrete encased steel columns, and exposed structural ceilings.

Two primary stair towers remain on the interior that date to the original periods of construction. One is located at the southeast corner of the building adjacent to the bank of passenger elevators. The other exits to the Lexington Street side of the building and is now approximately centered in the north wall following the 1941 and 1948 additions. The southeastern stair tower extends continuously between the sub-basement and the eighth floor. The north stair tower starts at the roof level and continues down to the second floor. At that level the main tower stops and an enclosed corridor leads to another

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**Section 7, Description: Page 5 Bernheimer-Leader Department Store
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enclosed stair further west on the floor plan; this is part of the 1941 expansion and extends between the second floor and basement.

All the stairs are constructed of similar materials with minor variations. The main stair framing is steel with cast metal balustrades, risers, and stringers. Treads are either terrazzo or slate and hand rails are wood. The stair tower walls and ceilings are plaster. All surfaces except for the stone treads are painted or varnished. The stair towers remain in good condition with their integrity. Other small runs of stairs for utilitarian purposes connecting varying floor levels within the sub-basement, basement, penthouse, and other service areas of the building remain. They are constructed variously of concrete, cast iron, and steel.

There are three other vertical circulation systems throughout the store. A set of six passenger elevators is located along the south wall and serve the basement through the eighth floor. Two retain decorative art deco metal work in their interior cabs. The other four have been modernized. These passenger elevators are only partially operational. A pair of freight elevators installed in the 1940s is located on the west wall near the Marion Street loading docks and serve the basement through the eighth floor. A non-functional former truck elevator along the south wall adjacent to the loading docks was used to enable entire loaded trucks to descend from Marion Street to the basement and sub-basement storage levels.

The mechanical, electric and plumbing systems in place currently are to some extent original or residual systems from the years of construction and remodeling. Boilers for hot water heating and an air conditioning system remain.

In summary, the eight-story department store building built in 1925 as the Bernheimer-Leader Store by Smith & May of Baltimore on the prominent corner of North Howard and West Lexington Streets in the Baltimore Market Center retail district retains its overall historic integrity of fine Neoclassical limestone and buff brick facades despite recent alterations for modern retail use. The original symmetrical architectural design elements of continuous arched storefront windows aligned with large paired steel windows in the upper seven stories enabled two nearly seamless expansions of the building to be undertaken in 1941 and 1948 by later owners, the May Company. The result is a significant edifice, known since 1959 as The Hecht Company, on a prominent corner site across from three remaining earlier department stores. Although the interior of the building retains few architectural elements of significance other than two stair towers and two Art Deco elevators, its open steel and concrete structural framing and fenestration pattern clearly define urban department store architecture of the first half of the century. For Baltimore it remains as the largest retail store built in the downtown Market Center during the 20th century.

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**Section 8, Significance: Page 6 Bernheimer-Leader Department Store
Baltimore, MD**

Summary

At the southwest corner of North Howard and West Lexington Streets in the Market Center of Baltimore stands the original building built for the merged Bernheimer-Leader Department Store in 1925. This building was expanded as the May Company Store (1927-59) and most recently known as The Hecht Company (1959-1989). The site is significant for its historic position in the development of the city's retail business adjacent to the Lexington Market, which flourished between 1875 and 1950. The building represents the largest of five major department stores in Baltimore and in the state of Maryland which were built before 1950 and is distinguished as the singular example of Neoclassical retail architecture within this Market Center complex. The building meets Criterion A for its economic role as a continually expanding competitive department store on Baltimore's North Howard Street shopping corridor and its importance as a major department store in the state between 1925 and 1950. Architecturally the building is significant under Criterion C for its Neoclassical facades and department store design rendered by the Baltimore architectural firm of Smith & May in 1925. The original eight-story limestone and buff-colored brick construction, with a notable street-level sequence of round-headed store windows separated by columns with Corinthian-like capitals was easily expanded in similar styling for two subsequent additions in 1941 and 1948. The building has allowed various owners to serve the Baltimore public in the retail trade between 1925 and 1989 without interruption. May Department Stores of St. Louis owned the building from 1927 to 1958. May's subsequent merger with Hechts of Baltimore in 1959 brought the building into the hands of the country's largest store-based mercantile firm at that time. The Hecht Company, one of Baltimore's oldest retail businesses, won new prominence by relocating to the Market Center. The weakening of the Market Center retail businesses through competition from suburban stores and the growth of the Inner Harbor complex caused the closing of The Hecht Company in 1989.

The Growth of the American Department Store and Its Architectural Typology

The development of the retail and architectural concept of a department store can be traced directly to Aristide Bouçicaud of France, who established a small shop in Paris selling diverse wares that he called *Bon Marché* (inexpensive) in 1838.¹ Beginning with a variety of dry goods that he continually enlarged upon, he brought under one roof specialty items--such as millinery, shoes, and underwear--that were otherwise sold in individual shops. By the early 1850s the concept of the "department store" had not only been realized architecturally, but also through the establishment of a new marketing philosophy.² Bouçicaud encouraged customers to enter his store and browse. Purchasing was not a requirement of looking. He also fixed his prices, eliminating the need to haggle or bargain. More importantly to encourage sales, he guaranteed money back if the customer was not satisfied. To produce profit and sales volume, his marketing technique used a small mark-up and rapid turn-over of merchandise. The use of fixed prices on a commodity enabled him to advertise his products and attract customers.³ The characteristics of a department store were established and quickly spread across the ocean to America.

¹ Robert Hendrickson, *The Grand Emporiums, An Illustrated History of America's Great Department Stores* (New York: Stein and Day, 1979), p. 26.

² The word store comes from the Greek word *stoa* that related to the arcades of the Agora in Athens where merchants sold their wares.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

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American merchandising of commercial products started with the itinerant peddler who carried his wares through the streets or over back roads to barter or sell a special commodity. Country markets served as temporary sales locations, or in small established communities often a general store evolved as a location where everything from produce to merchandise could be obtained, including postal services. In cities, where commodities were produced, dry good or specialty stores for individual products reigned.

After the Civil War production of material goods became more prolific through industrialized processes. Improved canal and railroad transportation systems made bulk supplies easily available. Furthermore a new density of city populations became a prime market of retailers. Such men as A. T. Stewart in New York and John Wanamaker in Philadelphia embraced the marketing ideals and philosophies of the French department store, and by the 1860s the full-fledged American version had evolved.

A. T. Stewart's block-long and eight-story store, built in 1862 between 9th and 10th Streets on New York's Broadway, boasted a cast iron facade on the outside and an emporium of goods from Europe and America on the inside under the control of over 2000 employees. On the east coast Stewart had defined the department store prototype: central location, multiple floors accessible by elevators; large open floor spaces; sky lights, atriums, or rotundas; all types of services from upholstery to funereal; ready-made clothing and goods; free deliveries; cash only; advertised merchandise. Operationally, buyers administered specialized departments, floor walkers assisted customers in finding wares, sales personnel manned the floors, and "cash children" (ages 10 to 16) transmitted payments to a head cashier. Comparison shoppers surveyed the efforts of competitors to assure appropriate prices and merchandise variety.⁴ From the 1860s on, department store survival meant meeting the competition head on.

Development of the Baltimore Lexington Market Center (1850-1900)

The growth of department stores in New York and Philadelphia during the last quarter of the 19th century reached Baltimore just as the Lexington Market, north and west of the commercial Baltimore Street, developed into the largest city market place covering an expanse three blocks long and more than a half a block wide. Lexington, Eutaw, and Paca Streets bounded the site, developed by the 1850s as the Lexington Market and continually enlarged. By the 1900s on a daily basis enormous sheds with 1,200 booths or stalls attracted and held 600 farmers' wagons bringing produce and goods to the people of Baltimore who visited the market by the thousands. As the Lexington Market grew, the retail business of the city migrated to North Howard Street, a wide artery perpendicular to Lexington. By 1875 the corner of North Howard and West Lexington Streets was the hub of retail enterprise. It was here that the Baltimore department stores were built and a prime retail district remained until after World War II.

The earliest retail store to open in this location was the Hutzler Store at Howard and Clay Streets, founded by Abram Hutzler in 1858. The business expanded into three small shops selling various dry goods. Features of the true department store business evolved through a one-price policy that eliminated bargaining by 1868, free delivery incorporated in 1874, and a guarantee of quality with all goods sold. The architectural trait of selling different types of goods under one roof did not stabilize until 1888 when the small stores were razed for a five-story stone structure designed by Baldwin & Pennington

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-39.

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at the corner location that became known as "The Palace." The Romanesque Revival style featured carved stone, arched and rectangular windows, roof turrets and a central pediment. On the first floor the ceilings were frescoed to introduce color and charm.

Hutzler's early competitor was Brager's of Baltimore, a store, located on the corner of Saratoga and Eutaw Streets and backing on to Clay. The business was founded in 1885 with \$4,000 capital in the middle of a retail shoe block by Albert A. Brager from Alexandria, Virginia, and Ferdinand Bernheimer. Bernheimer withdrew four years later, but Brager continued on his own. The dry goods and notions that filled the first 22 by 66 foot store expanded into a full-fledged department store that took up nearly a full block by 1927. During that year it was taken over by the American Department Stores Corporation of New York.

Ferdinand Bernheimer did not abandon the retail business, however. In 1888, he joined his younger brother Herman Bernheimer to establish the Bernheimer Brothers "Bargain Emporium" in the 300 block of West Lexington Street. As business increased, serving both the lower and upper economic classes, they kept buying neighboring properties until they accumulated a sizeable piece of real estate strategically located close to the Lexington Market. Thus began the development of a third department store in the Market Center. Within a decade a fourth new building had been built. On November 15, 1897, Max Hochschild and the Kohn brothers transferred their dry goods businesses at Gay and Charles Streets to a new location next to Hutzler's. By 1927 the Hochschild-Kohn store's success had brought an expansion on Clay Street from 18,000 to 250,000 square feet.

Finally, in 1899 Elias and Samuel Posner, who had opened a series of retail stores in 1876 at 172-74 West Lexington Street and then moved to 134-138, decided to expand. Just as Hutzler's established a large single emporium, Samuel Posner built a six-story department store designed by Charles E. Cassell at the corner of Howard and Lexington Streets across from Hutzler's. He chose an Italianate Renaissance Revival design featuring cream colored brick and terra cotta masonry on the outside and an open gallery on the interior. The building was designed as fireproof construction and purposely featured a powerhouse for steam and electricity across the street that was connected by an underground tunnel. An advanced technology of the time was a pneumatic cash system that replaced the need for "cash children." In 1904 Posner sold his store to Louis Stewart of New York, a former railroad magnate who had become involved in various department store businesses throughout the country. Within the decade Stewart renovated and expanded the store through to Clay Street, repeating the architectural pattern but raising the new wing to nine stories.

Market Center Department Stores 1900-1950

By 1900, within a fifteen year period, five major department store buildings had opened in the Market Center district of Baltimore, creating ongoing competition among the retailers and establishing architectural edifices of significance for years to come. A new competitor known as the Leader Store opened in 1904 located at the southwest corner of Howard and Lexington Streets (the site of the nominated building). The Bernheimer Brothers farther down the block noted their new business competitor and consequently took on new partners. They quickly realized that their retail space was inadequate and acquired additional property along West Fayette Street. In 1908, a new Bernheimer building in Beaux Arts design with large Ionic columns opened at 308 West Fayette and Lexington Streets with great fanfare. It quickly became a popular and diverse retail establishment. In addition to the dry goods department, the basement contained a market, grocery, and

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butcher shop; a 600-seat restaurant and vaudeville theater were located on upper floors. When weather permitted, shoppers could go to the rooftop terrace to dine and treat the children to a game at a bowling alley or a merry-go-round ride while watching cows being milked by electric machines. The Bernheimer Department Store had become a city attraction for much more than just dry-goods. The business and the building it was housed in established a department store role and image that had reached a zenith.

Not to be outdone, in 1923, two years after the death of Ferdinand Bernheimer, a merger took place with the Leader Store located at the corner of Howard and Lexington Streets. Together the merged stores grossed \$7 million dollars. Immediately the new Bernheimer-Leader firm announced an expansion scheme to build an eight-story department store on the Leader site at the cost of one-and-a-half million dollars. The Baltimore architectural firm Smith & May was selected for the project. Wilson L. Smith (1878-1931) and Howard May (d. 1941) established their practice in 1907 and were known for their commercial office buildings such as the Maryland Trust Company, schools, and additions to the Baltimore Trust Company Building--the city's first skyscraper. The Bernheimer-Leader Store would be the largest in Baltimore and the entire south, boasting fireproof construction and a new type of display window. Interior fittings are reported to have included walnut paneling, Caen stone walls, and marble floors.⁵ A sub-basement would allow delivery trucks to be lowered by elevators from the street level for unloading into the store. The new Bernheimer-Leader store opened on May 25, 1925, and today this structure at the southwest corner of Lexington and Howard forms the core of the current building. Of these six principal founding department stores, the business that finally achieved the largest structure and the most recent and newest integrated construction, was the building built to house a new merged business at the end of the first quarter of the 20th century--the Bernheimer-Leader Department Store.

But the competition among the other stores had not slowed down during the early decades of the century. The Hutzler department store business thrived and expanded, adding a new five-story building on Saratoga Street in 1916. This was enlarged by another five stories in 1924 to include sales departments, workrooms and offices. The Palace was enlarged during the same year to include beauty and sports shops and a silverware section. In 1928 growth on North Howard Street and eventual connection by tunnel between the main store and an expanded Saratoga Street complex furthered their business. Despite the Depression, a commitment to Baltimore retailing brought about a new facade unifying the added store fronts on Howard Street. By 1932 a sleek, *Art Moderne* face designed by James R. Edmunds, Jr., stressing vertical insets and window patterns and using polished granite, polychromed glazed brick, and applied bronze lettering stood in contrast to the original ornate Romanesque Revival store front. In 1941 the modern facade was raised five more stories and became the dominant structure in the streetscape.

For Bernheimer-Leader a new change occurred in 1927. Just two-years after construction, the family-owned business was purchased by the St. Louis based May Department Stores Company for \$7,000,000. This eastward move of May Company into the Baltimore retail business brought about two building expansions in the 1940s. In 1941, a 47' wide, eight-story addition was built onto the core building on Lexington Street, covering three building lots. The total square footage of the store had then reached 320,000. Architects for this addition were again Smith & May and the contractors

⁵"Maryland Memories: Bernheimer--A Synonym for Bargains" in *News American*, February 13, 1872. Bernheimer-Leader file, Annoch Pratt Library, Baltimore.

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were the Cogswell Construction Company of Baltimore. The new construction was instrumental in invigorating other modernizations and expansions in Baltimore's retail shopping district.

In October 1948, in response to increasing patronage and plant improvements in all stores, the second addition by May Company was opened to the public. The new eight-story section joined the previous construction immediately to the west along Lexington Street, adding 42' to the facade and 80,000 square feet to the retail area. The new entrance on Lexington Street featured a new all-glass window design with full visibility to the floor within. The masonry framing was black Andes granite and Milford pink granite. Improvements included a cafeteria, hospital, recreation space for employees, air conditioning, and six escalators. The architect for this expansion was Francis J. Thuman and construction was carried out again by Cogswell.

Generally, between 1925 and 1950 competition between stores continued to be fierce and force new ownership and improvements, even during the Second World War years. For Stewart's Department Store on the east side of Howard Street business continued to increase during the 1920s and renovations and improvements were ongoing. The introduction of air conditioning occurred in 1934 and new elevators in 1936. In 1927 Brager's, located at the southwest corner of Lexington and Park Avenue, was taken over by the American Department Stores Corporation of New York. Twenty years later under the new name Brager-Eisenberg's a modernization and building campaign was undertaken. Hutzler's also began expansion again following World War II, adding multiple branch stores in the suburbs--the new trend for the second half of the 20th century.

Suburban Growth and Market Center Decline

In the 1950s a fire in Lexington Market caused a sudden new concern to the retail shopping center at Lexington and Howard Streets. Although the market was replaced with two new indoor modern market buildings and a garage, new highway systems, the growth of suburban shopping malls, and outward city migration caused a change to the retail population. To further add to the competition, parking issues, discount stores, catalogue shopping, and larger supermarkets diverted sales in the downtown shopping areas. To help counter a decline in the retail trade, in 1954 Stewart's Department Store introduced an art gallery on the sixth floor and built stores in the suburbs. Hochschild-Kohn opened branch stores and increased more specialized departments from furniture to fuel oil. For Brager's, in 1955 two Baltimore financiers, Paul D. Sowell, President and General Manager of the store and William A. Graham purchased the retail business from F. E. Schluter and Associates of Princeton, who had controlled the company for 27 years. Meanwhile Hutzler's celebrated its 100th year anniversary in 1958.⁶

For the May Company, a 1953-innovative addition was made in the Baltimore store by Leonard J. Novograd, vice president and general manager. The Court Yard Restaurant with seating for 244 persons was added on the eighth floor. The space featured tiny shops created by John Gerald of New York that surrounded the dining space. Architectural details, lighting, fountains, and replication store fronts reminiscent of 19th-century Baltimore achieved ambiance and decor. The success of the restaurant was marked by the issuance of a liquor license in 1960--something only nine other stores in the country could claim.

⁶ Francis F. Beirne, "Hutzler's . . . A Picture History 1858-1958" (Baltimore, 1958), Hutzler's file, Enoch Pratt Library.

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In October 1958, to increase its suburban branches, May Company Stores merged with a long-established Baltimore retailer, Hecht Company. This merger caused the new entity to have combined sales of \$638,358,095 surpassing the likes of Marshall Field & Company, Gimbel Brothers, Inc., R. H. Macy & Company, and the Federated Department Stores, Inc., with sales at \$635,591,528. The merger was finalized in February 1959 and allowed Hecht's eleven stores in Baltimore, Washington and suburban branches to be added to May's 35 in eight different cities. This created the largest department store chain in the country excluding mail-order firms. The May Company retained its name on all of the stores except those in the Baltimore and Washington areas which continued to be known as The Hecht Company.

In June 1959, following stockholders approval of the merger of the two companies, a master plan was devised for the Baltimore stores. The Hecht store known as The Hub, located at Charles and Baltimore Streets, was closed and all inventory moved to the main store. Modernization plans at a cost of nearly three million dollars were then initiated for the Howard and Lexington Street store to keep pace with suburban shopping. The designs were planned by Daniel Schwartzman of New York City. The concept was a street level "metro floor" with wide aisles and self-service fixtures. Access to the basement budget apparel store via a new escalator retained a mixed price category of goods. The second floor was entitled a fashion store. The third floor was called Youth World; the fourth featured women's fashion budget apparel. Men's furnishings were relocated on the first floor at the candy-making site with a new entrance on Fayette Street. To become Maryland's number one retailer the four upper floors were converted to household furnishings. Structural improvements involved removal of walls, new escalators, modernization of air condition and heating and a see-through design for the street display windows with added awnings. To further emphasize Hecht's, the advertising logo was redesigned to eliminate May Company and read "The Hecht Company."⁷ These corporate improvements established an

⁷ The Hecht Company itself began in Baltimore in 1857 as a furniture store and was located on Aliceanna Street, near Broadway. The founder, Samuel Hecht, Jr., was a Bavarian immigrant who arrived in the great wave of emigration from Middle Europe and established himself as a peddler. By 1870 he had moved his furniture business to 412 South Broadway; nine years later he opened his first clothing store. Eventually four of his five sons became involved in the business. The family has been credited with introducing price tags to the Baltimore retail trade to avoid the process of price haggling. In 1896 a store in Washington opened, followed the next year with a new store in Baltimore known as "The Hub" at Baltimore, Charles, and Fayette Streets. This became a leading apparel store and served the shopping area and surrounding office buildings. New York City was introduced to a Hechts store at 14th Street near Sixth Avenue in 1900 for the sale of apparel and home furnishings.

Samuel's son Moses Hecht lead the firm until his death in 1954, incorporating it in 1918 and keeping profits on the rise. By 1945 the company featured eight branches including a store in Easton, Maryland, and suburban sites. In 1945 the principal store for earnings was The Hecht Co., Washington, a basic department store. The Hub in Baltimore selling apparel ranked second. Hecht Bros. became the name of the home furnishings stores. In Baltimore this store was located at Baltimore and Pine out of the main shopping area, but with easy parking. Other branches were at South Broad and in Easton. The combined sales of all stores exceeded \$44,000,000 in 1945.

Business practices were the purchase of merchandise on the competitive open market and emphasis on nationally-branded lines, when important. Deferred payment plans were made available to the public starting in 1890 for either six months or for a full year or larger items. In 1945 the deferred payment plans made up 26% of sales, charge accounts 24% and the remaining 50% cash. During the same year employees totaled 4,500. In 1950 sales reached \$84,029,871 with firm profits at \$4,058,496. Sales continued

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opportunity for The Hecht Company store to shine as the leading store in the Baltimore Market Center for the next thirty years, but with gradual declines.

The decades of the 1970 and 1980s saw permanent dissolution of the Baltimore Market Center department store trade. Hochschild-Kohn's Howard Street store was forced to close in 1977. Fire destroyed the vacant building in February 1983 and the remaining walls were demolished. New construction stands on the site in 1999. During 1974 Stewart's used special efforts and merchandising techniques to draw customers to their store, but success was minimal. In 1979 Stewart's Department Store shut its doors. By 1982 Hutzler's Howard Street store began to reduce its floor space as retail business diminished and it too closed.

Even The Hecht Company experienced the Market Center decline. By an agreement of 1981 with the City of Baltimore the upper three stories of their building were leased for city offices. The Hecht Company underwent a final upgrade to further compete with shops at the revitalized Inner Harbor and with suburban retailing. As the *Evening Sun* stated, "Shrink one huge downtown department store, add lots of chrome, brass and mirrors, a few scalloped awnings on the outside, some Evan Picone clothes inside, and The Hecht Co. means business on Howard Street . . . suburban style" (September 22, '82). Refurbishments that demolished walls and floors and cost upwards of 3.5 million dollars trimmed the retail square footage from 280,000 to 150,000. The reduction in floor space meant that a new Hechts store in Towson of 160,000 square feet spread over three floors became larger than Baltimore's former flagship store. To save the inner city store, merchandise lines were upgraded, new lighting, counters, and decorations were added, and the facade was cleaned, all with the hopes of attracting new patrons into the commercial district.

Despite the remodeling of 1982, by October 1988 sales projections had not been met. The Hecht Company store was forced to close its doors on January 29, 1989. Three hundred employees had to be relocated to seven other stores in the Baltimore area and the remaining retail firms of Market Center were left with new concerns for retaining the vitality of retailing in a once thriving downtown. When The Hecht Company building was sold in 1990 to Petrie, Dierman and Partners of McLean, Virginia, prospects for continuation of retailing were slim. The end of an era of department store retailing for this building and the Lexington Market Center of Baltimore had arrived.

Conclusion

The Bernheimer-Leader department store, built in 1925 in a restrained Neoclassical design at the corner of North Howard and West Lexington Streets in the Market Center district of Baltimore, stands as the largest store built during the 19th or 20th century in this commercial area. It provides testimony to the development of this section of Baltimore from an early residential and lodging area to one catalyzed into commercial growth through the 19th-century Lexington Market for produce and goods. The store remains as one of four of the five prominent department store buildings that represented the height of the city's retail affluence associated with the Lexington Market between 1875 and 1950. The site of the building

to increase, reaching \$113,245,444 in 1956, but profits dropped to \$3,611,426. By January 31, 1958, the end of the fiscal year, sales were down to \$104,700,752. By then another Samuel Hecht, grandson of the founder, was Chairman of the Board of the Hecht Company and oversaw the merger with May Company Department Stores on January 31, 1959.

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itself had been used for a department store since 1904, and as such represents a street corner important in serving Baltimore's economy. The continued expansion of the new 1925 building through 1948 under the St. Louis-based May Company attests to its significance as a competitor in serving the population of Baltimore for continuous retail needs--a significant commercial event. Ownership by The Hecht Company, a Baltimore firm, between 1959 and 1989 further supported the mercantile life of the city until the decline of the Market Center retail businesses caused its closing. The building, constructed in 1925 by Smith & May with concrete and steel technology, stands today as the newest of the department stores in the remaining commercial corridor and is significant for its architectural style, department store design and prominence on the streetscape. Built to serve retail needs, the architecture of the building fulfilled the department store typology that developed over time: large, continuous store-front windows for display purposes; open floor arrangements that allowed for changing promotional needs and installation of creative marketing tools, large windows for light and air, and elevator access (eventually escalators were added) to reach as high as the eighth floor with speed. Basements served by truck elevators accommodated delivery of goods and storage. The integrity of the buildings mass, scale, footprint, exterior building materials of brick, limestone, and terra cotta exemplify both the building type and architectural fashions of 1925. The former Bernheimer-Leader, May, and Hecht Company department store building stands as a major architectural contribution to the streetscape of downtown Baltimore and the largest surviving department store building to provide historic memories of the retail life of the inner city.

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**Section 9, Bibliography: Page 14 Bernheimer-Leader Department Store
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Retail District/Market Center District (B-1262), Baltimore, MD. Prepared by Fred B. Shoken, May 9, 1986

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**Section 10, Geographical Data: Page 15 Bernheimer-Leader Department Store
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Verbal Boundary Description

The former Bernheimer-Leader Department Store at 118 North Howard Street is located at the southwest corner of North Howard and West Lexington Streets in Ward 4, Section 10, Block 619, on Lots 18-27 as shown on the attached site survey by STV Incorporated, 21 Governor's Court, Baltimore, MD, completed on November 24, 1997, Drawing No. 61-03-1654.

Boundary Justification

The above referenced boundaries as shown on Drawing No. 61-03-1654 by STV Inc., 1997, are related to the original and expanded boundaries of the Bernheimer-Leader Department Store and all subsequent owners until current ownership in 1999. They reflect the precise location of the standing building at the corner of North Howard and West Lexington Streets on Lots 18-27 of Block 619, Section 10, Ward 4 in Baltimore, MD, built in 1925 and expanded through 1948.

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Additional Documentation: Page 16

**Bernheimer-Leader Department Store
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Historic Image

"Mr. Leon C. Coblens, President Bernheimer-Leader Stores and new Unit of the Bernheimer Leader Stores, Howard and Lexington Streets [c. 1927]." Published in "Power Plant Pictorial," March 1927, No. 10, p. 38.

Black and White Photographs

- No. 1 Former Bernheimer-Leader Department Store, view southwest looking at the main West Lexington Street facade. The additions of 1941 and 1948 are noticeable to the right.
- No. 2 Former Bernheimer-Leader Department Store, view southeast along West Lexington Street showing the north and west facades.
- No. 3 Former Bernheimer-Leader Department Store, view north on North Howard Street, showing the south facade and two-level penthouse.
- No. 4 The northeast corner entrance created in 1995 for the current drug store in the former Bernheimer-Leader Department Store, looking south along North Howard Street.
- No. 5 The southeast corner of the former Bernheimer-Leader Department Store. View northeast showing the south facade along Marion Street and the two-level penthouse on the roof.

Plans

Subject Site Plan, Block #619, North Howard and West Lexington Streets, City of Baltimore.

Floor Plans A-1 to A-14, STV Inc., Baltimore

Site Survey of former Bernheimer-Leader/Hecht Company Store, Drawing 61-03-1654, Sheet 1, STV Inc., Baltimore.

Map

USGS 7.5 Series Map, Baltimore East Quadrangle



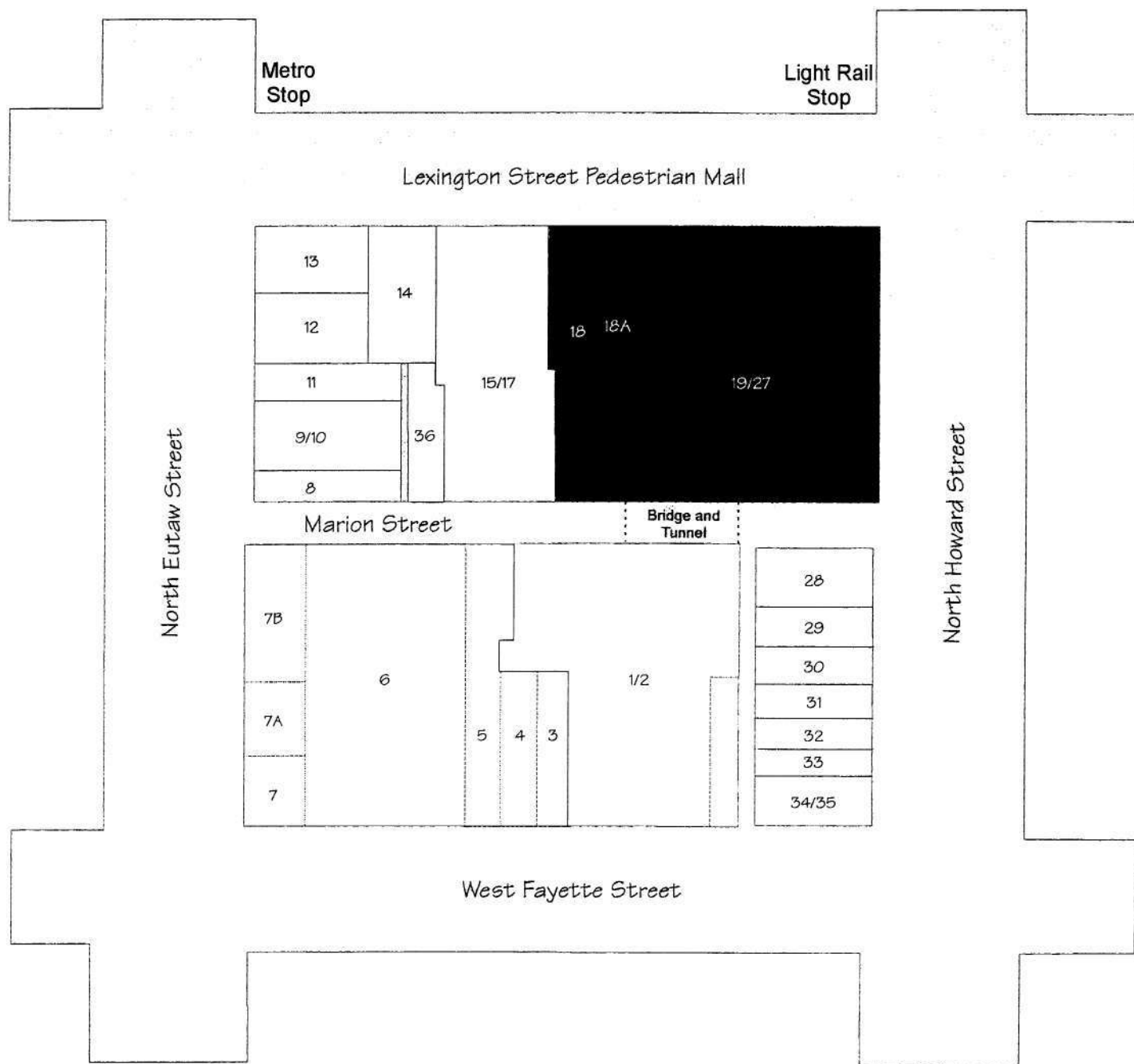
MR. LEON C. COBLENS, President, Bernheimer-Leader Stores.
New unit of the Bernheimer-Leader Stores, Howard and Lexington Streets.
(See page 42)

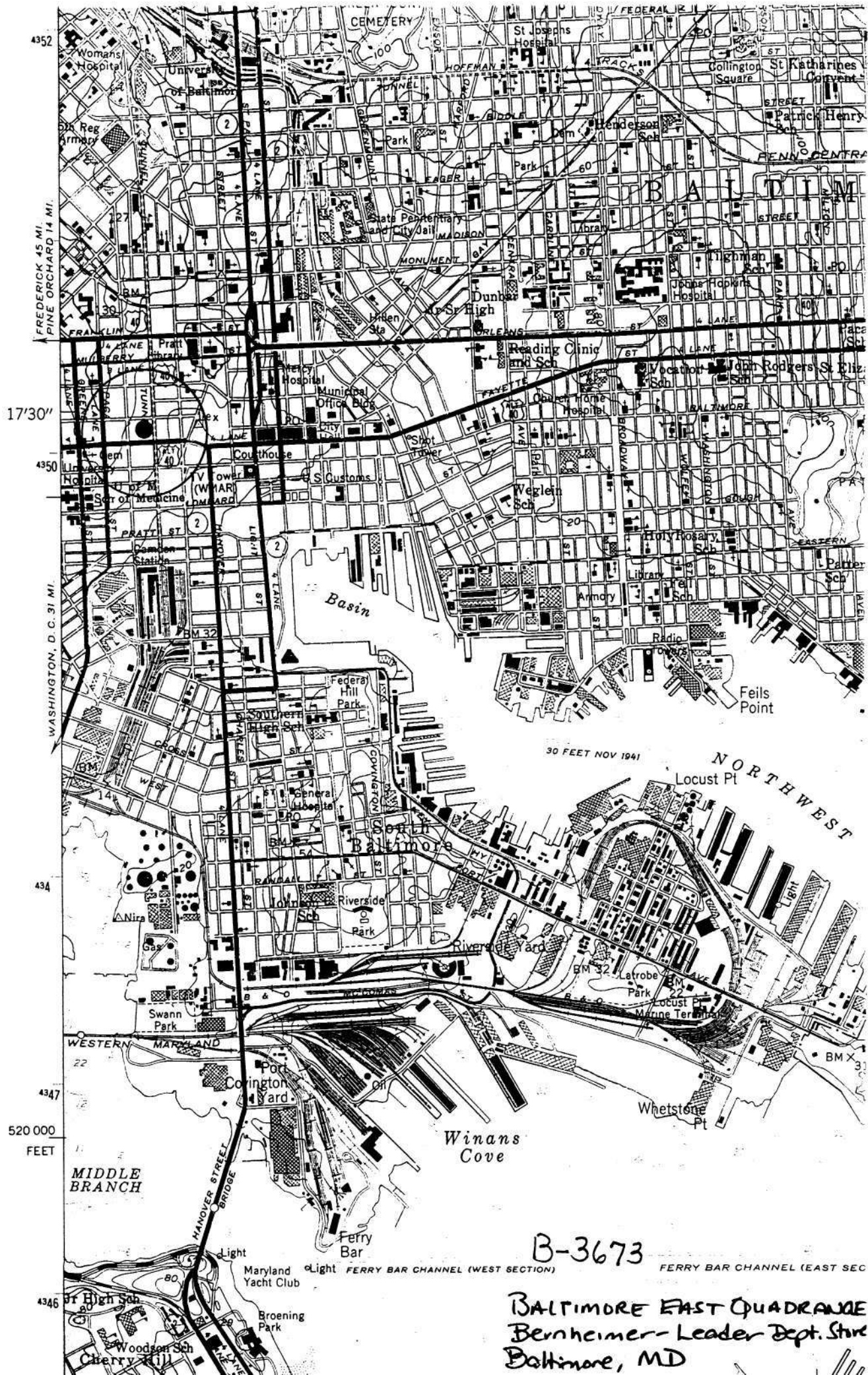
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Bernheimer-Leader Department Store ca. 1927., Baltimore, MD.
Published in "Power Plant Pictorial," March 1927, No. 10, p. 38.

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SUBJECT SITE





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BALTIMORE EAST QUADRANGLE
Bernheimer-Leader Dept. Store
Baltimore, MD

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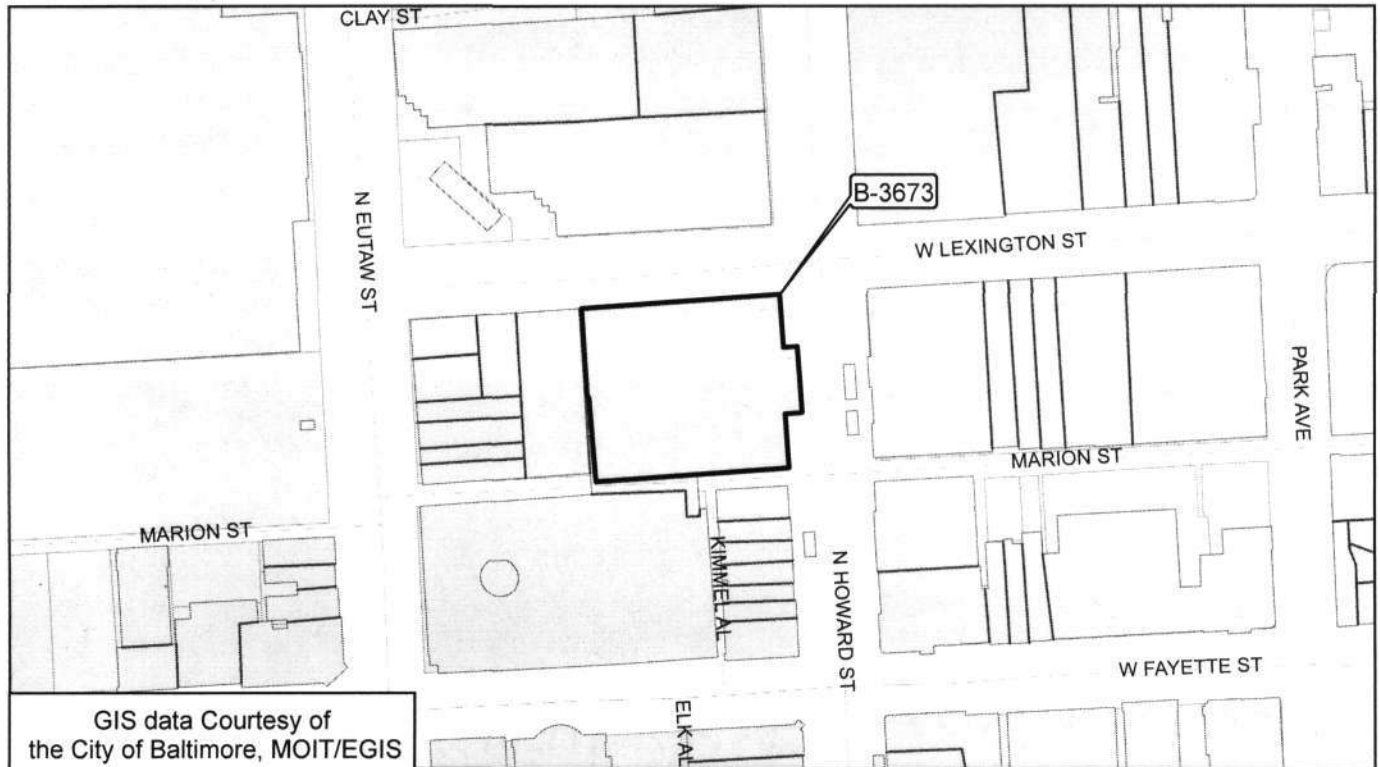
Hecht Company (May Company Store, Berneheimer-Leader Department Store)

118 N. Howard Street

Block 0619, Lot CO0619

Baltimore City

Baltimore East Quad.





No. 1 Former Bernheimer-Leader Department Store, view southwest looking at the main West Lexington Street facade. The additions of 1941 and 1948 are noticeable to the right. Baltimore, MD.

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No. 2 Former Bernheimer-Leader Department Store, view southeast along West Lexington Street showing the north and west facades. Baltimore, MD.

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No. 3 Former Bernheimer-Leader Department Store, view north on North Howard Street, showing the south facade and two-level penthouse. Baltimore, MD.

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No. 4 The northeast corner entrance created in 1995 for the current drug store in the former Bernheimer-Leader Department Store, looking south along North Howard Street. Baltimore, MD.

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No. 5 The southeast corner of the former Bernheimer-Leader Department Store. View northeast showing the south facade along Marion Street and the two-level penthouse on the roof. Baltimore, MD.

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